M&S in first TV denim campaign as it boosts growth in its top category

By Sandra Halliday - February 4, 2020

Analysts have been urging M&S to focus on its winners as it works on its turnaround and it appears to be doing just that with big new support behind its denim offer.

The company is the UK market leader for women’s denim and sells 15 pairs of jeans every minute across women’s, men’s and kids, making denim its biggest category overall. This will now be reflected in a mega campaign for the category that includes TV for the first time.

It follows the success of its knitwear and nightwear-focused campaigns over the Christmas period that were another example of how focusing on key categories can pay off.

M&S said its denim sales have already risen in double-digits this year and the team has doubled the buy on its popular jeans in anticipation of the new campaign.

The campaign itself will promote the style, fit and value of its denim and the company said that this “is part of the retailer’s strategy to make the big, bigger giving crucial focus to growing its killer categories. M&S Denim is a multi-million-pound operation serving one in 10 denim shoppers in the UK and growing it is central to M&S’s transformation”.

It added that its Womenswear & Kidswear Director Jill Stanton and Menswear Director Wes Taylor and their teams have "re-energised the denim business in a number of ways including introducing new modern fits" such as the Harper (a cigarette cut jean) and brand-new products, such as "M&S’s most sustainable jeans to date".

The latter is a women's jean retailing at £29.50 and featuring polyester that’s 100% made from recycled plastic bottles and cotton that is 100% responsibly sourced.
With the knit and nightwear campaigns, the company zeroed in on some star pieces and this will be the case again with some key launches being highlighted. M&S is launching what it calls Magic Jeans in womenswear – high waisted skinnies that feature “flattering tummy technology, bi-stretch denim for superior comfort and a gap-proof waist band”. They’ll be one of several styles highlighted by the campaign, which will also put a strong focus on the most popular cut, skinny jeans. That will include in womenswear, the £19.50 Ivy skinny jean that launched last year. It has already become a bestseller and it said almost 0.3 million pairs were sold from October to December.

In Menswear, the focal point of the campaign will be the new Vintage £29.50 range available in a variety of washes and three fits – straight, slim and skinny. It added that skinny jeans continue to grow in popularity among men with sales up 150% compared to last year.

The company also appears to be determined not to repeat the problems it had last year when some popular denim items that featured in its marketing campaign were out of stock due to logistics issues. It said it has put in place a number of operational improvements “to deliver better availability so customers can be confident they can get the style they want in the size they want”.

M&S added: “The team has reshaped the buy to ensure a more even spread across the most popular sizes and bought in greater depth to ensure product has strong availability in the key campaign period”.

This approach appears to have paid off so far with denim womenswear sales up 10% this year compared to last year and up 30% over the Christmas period. The company also said the number of transactions including two or more pairs of jeans rose from 15% to 19% in recent months.

It’s no surprise then that this latest activation is the third marketing campaign for its denim in less than a year and that it sees double the marketing investment and double the buy.

The company also wants to use this latest push to boost consumer awareness of its overall denim offer in the UK. Although, as mentioned, denim is its biggest category and it’s the market leader for womenswear in denim, it comes only fourth out of 21 retailers when consumers are asked to name a brand for denim. “M&S aims to be first, building on the popularity of its denim and the scale of its business,” it said.

To do this, as well as moving into TV for the first time, it will use billboards, print ads and social media. Some 97% of M&S’s target customers are expected to see the new campaign on average 13 times “helping make M&S top of mind as a destination for denim across womenswear, menswear and kidswear”.

M&S's new denim campaign has a big focus on skinny jeans